BC Ministry of Transportation and Highways Newsletter

Road Runner

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Ministry supports avalanche awareness

Claire Dansereau, centre, with a $5,000 contribution to the Canadian Avalanche Foundation. The deputy minister attended Mount Seymour's Avalanche Awareness Days with Canadian Avalanche Association president Chris Stethem, left, and Jack Bennetto, manager of MoTH's snow and avalanche programs and vice president of the Avalanche Foundation. (See story page 4)

Centralized data system streamlines accounting

The ministry's Cache Creek to the Rockies program is using a brand new, custom-designed project management system that provides a single source of information for project accounting, monitoring and planning.

The centralized source of data also streamlines information-gathering and increases efficiency. As an example, regional accounting staff can now input project information once instead of forwarding several entries to Victoria for later reconciliation.

Senior business analyst and project manager David Friesen describes the new architecture as "the nucleus of a new corporate project management system that will soon be used for the ministry's entire capital program." It is already being employed on several major projects, including the South Fraser perimeter road and the Okanagan Lake Bridge.

CCR program director Gregg Singer sponsored development of the new system to enable Thompson-Okanagan and Kootenays regional staff to share project information with colleagues in other offices. Since being introduced, the consolidated source of data has improved communication and decision making as well as overall project management.

The new technology replaces the outdated DOS-based project management software used on the Vancouver Island Highway Project, which Singer also oversaw.

Nancy Merston, planning and major projects senior manager of finance and project services, ensured the new system equaled or exceeded the business requirements of major projects.

The new capital project management system, which cost just $270,000 to develop, was put into use in December, just seven months after it was approved for development.

The new system was built quickly using "rapid application development methodology," which placed the development team in direct contact with the eventual users of the system.

"Technical staff were in the fortunate position to have instant feedback and ongoing testing," recalls Friesen.

"Credit must go to the staff here in the project office who rose to meet the challenge," Friesen said. "This, combined with overwhelming support from the ministry's executive, is what made this IT project a success."

Message from the ADM

John Dyble, assistant deputy minister, planning and major projects

The past year has been a busy one in the area of capital projects and we can look for big challenges in the coming year, too. I think we can be proud of the ministry's delivery of the capital programs and I want to thank the many people who are making it happen.

While we are very good at project delivery, there are always ways to improve and I would like to touch on some of those. To my mind, project management is an area where we can strive for continuous improvement. This leads to better quality investment for the funding available.

One of the directions from the ministry executive is to move to a single project management system. As a result, the Vancouver Island Highway and CCR project teams have been developing a new project management system that will allow us to integrate the project management and financial functions. The team spent many extra hours in developing this system, which is the first of its kinds in the provincial government. More details about this new technology appear elsewhere in this edition of the Road Runner.

Last November, MoTH staff from around the province met in Kamloops for a two-day workshop where we looked at project management in the ministry.

The workshop, which was subtitled Building on our Experience, highlighted the many benefits of sharing our collective expertise, learning from our mistakes and striving for this continual improvement. Many of the topics we explored are covered in a new project management manual developed by the ministry's investment management branch in Victoria. The results of this work will be available soon.

On another front, Dan Doyle and I have been meeting with the consulting engineers to examine how their work can be improved. We have been discussing areas such as quality assurance procedures and contracting approaches that will result in better designs.

Our expanded use of value engineering and value analysis is also resulting in better products and lower costs.

An example of the benefits of value engineering can be found in the South Coast region's work on the newly-constructed Highway 1 westbound lanes between the Sumas and Vedder canals. In this case, $1.7 million was saved on bridge costs and the elimination of access ramps through the extra time taken to conduct value engineering. It is estimated that the long-term benefits of the value engineering, due to additional safety and reduced maintenance costs, will save a further $2.2 million during the 50-year life cycle of the project.

Progress in these areas is exciting. Ministry teams around the province are pulling together to improve our capacity to build highways on time and on budget, and to offer better value for the taxpayer's dollar.

Road Runner

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Workforce to reflect diversity of province

Employment equity policies ensure the ministry's workforce reflects the diversity of the province. Equity programs can also help adjust the composition of the ministry's workforce.

Members of the ministry's employment equity/multiculturalism committee work individually and as a team to promote and employment equity and multiculturalism awareness and activities.

The committee is structured to represent the ministry's departments and regions as well as the four under-represented groups in government: women, persons with disabilities, visible minorities and aboriginal persons.

Programs include mentoring—pairing two employees of differing levels of experience and expertise for mutual benefit—and ensuring equity for under-represented groups in government, such as women, persons with disabilities, visible minorities and aboriginal people. For more information on equity employment initiatives, follow this link:

EmploymentEquity

A day in the life of an avalanche technician

For those of us who sit in front of computer terminals every day, snow avalanche technicians appear to have pretty exciting jobs.

As we answer our phones and go through our in-baskets, they climb snowy slopes, travel in helicopters and use high-tech equipment to trigger avalanches.

But that kind of activity is all in a day's work, according to snow avalanche technician Scott Aitken.

"At first glance, it might seem like a glamorous job but we are always thinking about snow conditions and safety," says the 14-year ministry veteran. "As professionals, we routinely use helicopters, skis and snowmobiles as tools of the trade to get the job done."

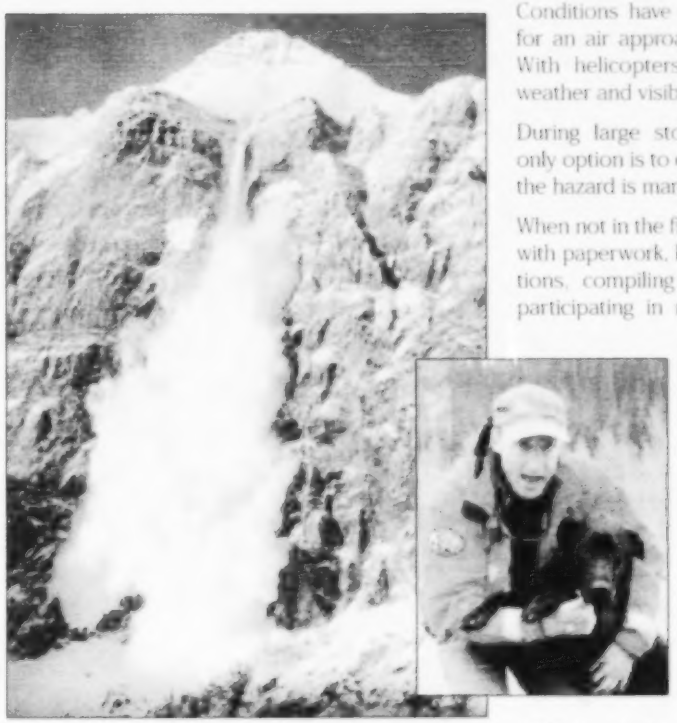
Aitken, one of eight ministry snow avalanche technicians, works in Howe Sound and the South Cariboo, which includes the Highway 99 corridor between Horseshoe Bay and Lillooet.

During avalanche season, roughly November to May, Aitken's typical day begins at 5:36 a.m. when the clock radio in his Whistler home wakes him with the first weather report of the day. By the time he arrives at the ministry's Pemberton office he already has an idea of local conditions.

Once at his desk, he reviews weather observation and forecast data as well as information provided by road maintenance crews. Then, using field data on snowpack composition, layering and strength, Aitken and assistant Doug Tuck prepare a hazard forecast for the region.

Since avalanche control frequently involves highway closures and traffic delays, the team's daily plan is usually reviewed with appropriate area and district highways managers as well as local road maintenance contractors.

When conditions indicate avalanche control is necessary, technicians use their training and experience to select the most appropriate method.



With some occassional assistance from his black lab rescue dog Decker, snow avalanche technician Scott Aitken manages seasonal hazards in Howe Sound and the South Cariboo

Predicting and managing avalanche conditions is partly science and partly art, Aitken says. "Snow is a fascinating, constantly changing medium and it's sometimes a challenge working with it since it's always close to its melting point."

About 35 times each season, Aitken uses a laptop computer to remotely fire one of the ministry's French-made Gaz-Ex exploders. The gas powered devices, which are permanently placed in avalanche start zones, trigger wide slab avalanches with explosive shock waves that radiate out as much as 80 metres.

Another method of avalanche control is carried out by dropping charges from a helicopter, something Aitken does about a dozen times a season. Conditions have to be ideal, however, for an air approach to be considered. With helicopters, we are limited by weather and visibility, he says.

During large storms, sometimes the only option is to close the highway until the hazard is manageable.

When not in the field, Aitken keeps busy with paperwork, logging blasting operations, compiling snowpack data and participating in rescue and avalanche training sessions, both as a student and as an instructor.

Taking training courses adds to the skills Aitken brings to the job. Recently, he and his black lab Decker became a certified search and rescue team with the Canadian Avalanche Rescue Dog Association.

While he admits some days can be long, working as an avalanche technician suits Aitken perfectly. He enjoys the outdoors, loves skiing and is rewarded by protecting the lives of the travelling public and road maintenance crews.

"Some days I think I might have the best job in Western Canada," he says.

And, because his interest in the outdoors also extends into the summer months, he says he's glad the snow eventually melts.

"I love paddling, too," he says with a smile.

REGIONAL ROUNDUP

REGION 1

DM backs Avalanche Association

Snow avalanches are the most deadly natural hazard in Canada. On average, over 100 people are caught in snow avalanches in Canada each year and 18 die. For each person killed, five more are caught by avalanches but survive. Many of these survivors receive serious injuries. More than two-thirds of these accidents take place where avalanche safety programs are not in place.

Deputy minister Claire Dansereau helped kick-off the three-day Avalanche Awareness Days event held at Mount Seymour on Jan. 14 with a $5,000 contribution to the Canadian Avalanche Foundation. Also attending the event was Jack Bennetto, MoTH's snow and avalanche programs manager and vice president of the Canadian Avalanche Association. Representatives from BC Parks, the B.C. Snowmobile Federation, the Canadian Ski Patrol and the Canadian Avalanche Rescue Dog Association also took part in the event.

The newly-formed Avalanche Foundation plans to raise and administer funds for public avalanche information, promote awareness and safety. It also intends to support programs that prevent or minimize avalanche risk and support research projects.

Fundraising is the primary initiative of the CAF in support of its objectives to prevent and/or minimize avalanche risk to the public.

The majority of the charity's founding members are, like the ministry's snow avalanche programs manager Jack Bennetto, senior members of the avalanche community dedicated to minimizing snow avalanche hazards. Margaret Kemper, whose son Michel Trudeau was killed in an avalanche, is also a founding member.

REGION 2

Workers begin construction on Lytton Bridge.

Lytton Bridge contracts awarded

By Jim Davidson, Regional Communications Coordinator

Work is under way in Lytton to build a new bridge on Highway 12 over the Thompson River. Minister Lali announced the award of a $9.8-million contract to JJM Construction Ltd. of Delta on February 16. An open house was held in Lytton Feb. 28 to brief local residents on the project construction schedule.

The new two-lane bridge, with a pedestrian sidewalk, will replace the single lane bridge built in 1913. It is scheduled to open for service in June 2001.

REGION 2

Hail and Farewell to Dennis Hill

Dennis Hill, our manager of administrative services and former manager of financial services, retired after 38 years of service with the ministry. Region 2 staff honoured Dennis at a special retirement luncheon on March 23.

During his career, Dennis participated in the district office manager training program, which helped prepare many staff members for future career opportunities. Dennis is an avid baseball fan and a founding member of the Kamloops Highways A ball team. In recent years he has become an expert on the "good machines" at the local casino he visits in between his trips to Las Vegas and Reno!

We wish Dennis and his wife, Deidre, all the best for every happiness and continued good health in the future.

REGION 3

Creston Valley Wildlife Bridge

By Larry Brown, Central Kootenay District

As the bridge area manager for the Central Kootenay district, I often get requests for surplus or salvaged bridge materials.

Last year, the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area, a branch of the Ministry of Environment, contacted me looking for surplus bridge materials to build a replacement for a two-span log bridge on Summit Creek washed away in 1997.

Although MoTH can rarely meet such requests, MLA Corky Evans requested we make a special effort to look for suitable materials that could be used for a replacement structure.

A thorough search of the ministry's storage facility turned up some suitable material for a new bridge, but unfortunately we were missing several key components.

Thanks to the special efforts of regional bridge engineers Sharlie Huffman and Allan Galambos (region four and region one respectively) we located the required pieces to build the bridge.

The 44th Field Engineers Squadron of the Canadian military coordinated the assembly of the 130 foot TSR Bailey bridge one weekend last September using machinery and extra personnel from all over Western Canada. .

MLA Corky Evans and Creston Mayor Lela Irvine officially opened the bridge on Oct. 24. The structure, dubbed Izzy Bridge by the military personnel who built it, was dedicated to the memory of Mark Isfeld, a young soldier killed in Croatia while removing landmines in 1994.

REGION 4

Building Bridges to Europe

by Ron Wiebe, Regional Communications Coordinator

If the connection between highways and the tiny Principality of Liechtenstein is not immediately apparent, read on.

Recently, the Central/North East region hosted a citizen of this tiny European nation (total area: 160 square kilometres; population: 32,000). Irene Ritter-Schachle, a human resources practitioner for the largest employer in her homeland, was sent by her company to learn English in Prince George.

The manager of the Prince George Language Centre is the daughter of former geotech staffer Len Thony. Len's cousin is a teacher at a similar centre in Leichtenstein, and therein lies the connection. It might also explain why so many of the school's clients are Liechtensteiners.

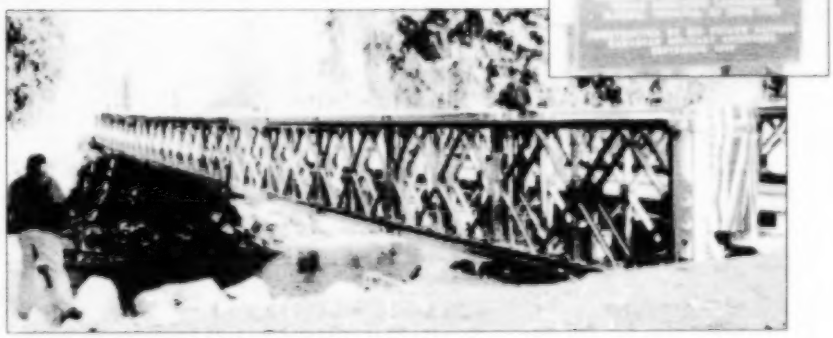
When not studying English during her six-week stay, Irene was learning about Canadian business practices. She worked two days a week with our human resources staff, noting many similarities and differences in work practices. In Liechtenstein for instance, there's little focus on safety or equity issues. "You have very special questions that you can ask of candidates here," she explained. "In Liechtenstein, we can ask almost anything."

Irene's language tutor obviously made great headway. "I didn't speak a word of English when I first arrived," she explained with perfect diction laced with a heavy German accent.

Irene enjoyed her time here and wishes her stay could have been longer. Unfortunately, Irene arrived during the winter's coldest snap (back home, it was a balmy -4°, and even that's considered chilly).

"I came in January because that's a slow time for us, but next time, I'll come back in the summer," she said with a shiver.

(Below) "Izzy" Bridge and plaque (right)



REGION 5

Gold, Silver and Bronze

By David Belford, Regional Communications Coordinator

Northwest regional and district offices were glittering with precious metals as staff displayed medals won at the Northern B.C. Winter Games in Fort St. John.

Once e-mail announcements started making the rounds, it was astounding how many staff members and their families participated in the Millennium Games.

Human resources technician Cheryl Parkes won a gold with the Terrace ladies basketball team. On any given day around coffee time, Cheryl, Greg Ross and others can be found netting basketballs at the hoop in the vehicle compound. Greg, who plays guard with the Terrace men's basketball team, won a bronze medal.

Wilf Taekema's son Kolten won gold, silver and bronze in doubles, singles and mixed doubles badminton. George Lomas' son Brian won a bronze medal in peewee hockey, as did Seiji Godo, son of Mac.

Kevin Sarsiat, son of team coach Dave, was also on the winning team. Dave Carson's son Brad brought home a silver medal in bantam hockey. In the Burns Lake office, Roger Vaughan's son Kevin won a bronze medal in chess.

As one district manager put it, "it is heartwarming to witness an event like the Winter Games bringing ministry staff together to share rewarding experiences."

Transportation and Highways Minister Harry Lali and Hong Kong Secretary of Transport Nicholas Ng in Vancouver. The two met April 7 to discuss transportation issues.

REGION 6

Highway delineation tests provide exciting results

By Debra Crozier Smith, Regional Communications Coordinator

Since Vancouver Island's heavy rain and fog can make visibility a problem, particularly after dark, there is a real need for highway delineation methods that are reliable in most weather conditions. Fortunately, an ongoing testing project is producing some exciting results in the South Island district of region six.

Working with headquarters staff and ICBC representatives, region and district offices tested several new delineation methods on both Highway 17 between Island View Road and the Swartz Bay ferry terminal, and on the Malahat Drive section of Highway 1, between Goldstream Park and Hall's Boathouse.

The light tubes tested on the centre median at Goldstream corner proved fairly successful, but the test ended when the manufacturer stopped producing the tubes. The ministry then tested high intensity reflectors installed along the top of the centre median, as well as regular reflectors mounted along the side of the median. This combination appears to be effective and well received.

The illuminated lighting on the Highway 17 median also proved popular. So popular, in fact, that theft became a real problem. After about 100 fixtures went "missing in action" over a period of less than two months, the district decided to replace them with a new test section of locally-made, solar-powered delineators--each one held firmly in place with bolts and epoxy glue to stymie would-be thieves.

Look for these test sections next time you drive between Victoria and the ferry terminal.

LOAD RESTRICTIONS

Safer roads and better relations

Each spring, the ministry imposes load restrictions on roads and highways around the province when thawing conditions leave them most vulnerable to damage. However, these restrictions can also hurt resource industries.

For example, oil and gas drilling activity in northeastern B.C.'s drops 85 per cent between February and May each year. This reduction represents a temporary loss of 4,500 jobs and reduces oil and gas royalties to the province.

However, in at least two areas of the province, the ministry has successfully used stakeholder consultations to improve the way it uses seasonal restrictions.

Reducing economic impact in the Peace

In the northeast region in early 1999, the ministry sponsored a focused consultation effort with the oil and gas industry in an effort to reduce the economic hardship created by seasonal load restrictions.

Representatives of industry, MoTH, ICBC and the North Peace Rural Roads Task Force took part in the discussions.

The group examined why restrictions are needed, the impact they have on the oil and gas industry, and possible ways to allow the industry to move goods and equipment while minimizing damage to public roads.

As a result of the meetings, specific roads were identified where less severe restrictions or increases in the maximum allowable gross vehicle weight could be put in place. Other routes were identified as being able to handle 16-wheel tandem axles. A follow up survey confirmed the short-term measures had helped the industry and no detrimental effects on public roads.

The industry also received a boost when Premier Dan Miller announced the Oil & Gas Initiative #2 in November 1999. The province will invest $103 million over five years to improve the public road network in the northeast. These upgrades will allow heavy trucks to use the roads for longer periods throughout the year.

Increasing compliance in the Cariboo

In the Cariboo and North Cariboo regions, non-compliance with load restrictions was severely damaging highways and prompting a steady stream of public complaints to district offices.

The full extent of the problem became apparent after roadside inspections revealed about 90 per cent of inspected drivers were hauling loads exceeding legal weight limits.

To increase compliance, representatives from MoTH, ICBC, the RCMP formed an Overweight Committee and began meeting two years ago with stakeholders from the logging industry. As industry awareness increased, so did compliance.

Before long, local mills agreed to began recording truck load weights. As compliance improved, ICBC began issuing good partner decals to drivers who complied with load restrictions at least 90 per cent of the time. The decal enabled drivers to be exempt from roadside inspection.

The new agreement has resulted in less pavement gouging in local roads and provided savings of several million dollars for the province, according to Cariboo district highways manager Tracy Cooper.

Today, with an overall compliance level of 83 per cent in the area, preparations are under way to hold Trucker Appreciation Day on May 25 in Williams Lake. Event organizers will present awards for rookie of the year, safe trucker, and weight compliant truckers.

A similar event was held in region five last year, where the overload safety program has been working since 1995 to raise awareness about safety issues related to load compliance.

At the awards held in Terrace last June, 71 truckers achieved scores over 95 per cent and eight scored 100 per cent.

Hopefully, Cariboo truckers will respond to their program in a similar way.

New Places, New Faces

The following individuals have been confirmed in their new positions since November 16, 1999

EMPLOYEE	LOCATION	POSITION	EFFECTIVE DATE
Dave Batchelor	Marine Branch, Burns Lake	Marine Engineer	November 24, 1999
Ernst Boeder	South Coast Region	Contract Administration Officer	January 24, 2000
Daniela Burgi	South Coast Region	Deputy Approving Officer	January 10, 2000
Sharon Cowden	Finance and Administration	Financial Clerk	January 1, 2000
Brent Dozzi	Howe Sound District	District Traffic Engineer	November 22, 1999
Hilda Earl	Vancouver Island Highway Project	Contract Processing Clerk	February 28, 2000
Christian Evans	Human Resources Branch	Administration Support Clerk	January 17, 2000
Christina Ewasiuk	Central/North East Region	Regional Design Secretary	January 24, 2000
Bruce Foster	Communications	Communications Assistant	November 29, 1999
David Godfrey	Information Systems	Systems Analyst	January 10, 2000
William Graham	North West Region	Financial Analyst, Professional Services	January 10, 2000
Lynn Greenall	South Coast Region	Administrative Services Clerk	January 24, 2000
Diane Guay	South Peace District	District Clerk	February 6, 2000
Brad Hannah	Construction and Maintenance	Radio and Electronics Technician	December 8, 1999
Julie Hansen	Central/North East Region	Operations Office Assistant	January 24, 2000
Rhonda Haslett	South Coast Region	Engineering Assistant, Projects	January 26, 2000
Jennifer Hegan	North West Region	Environmental Coordinator	January 4, 2000
Perry Holmes	South Coast Region	Project Management Technician	February 21, 2000
Patrick Kelly	Kootenay Boundary District	District Office Manager	January 4, 2000
Susan Kwiatkowski	South Coast Region	Administrative Services Clerk	February 10, 2000
Mary Laing	Central/North East Region	Project Management Clerk	December 27, 1999
Kelly Mess	Thompson-Okanagan Region	Systems Technician	February 28, 2000
Connie Nicoletti	Construction and Maintenance	Rehabilitation Engineer	November 18, 1999
Karen Orrell	South Coast Region	Assistant Secretary	January 4, 2000
Dan Palesch	Central Kootenay District	Area Manager, Roads	January 5, 2000
Cheryl Parkes	North West Region	Human Resources Technician	January 4, 2000
Robert Penner	North West Region	Project Manager, Paving	December 13, 1999
Don Rosberg	Information Systems	Business Analyst	January 17, 2000
Brad Scott	South Coast Region	Engineering Assistant, Projects	January 26, 2000
Greg Smith	Kootenays Region	Project Supervisor	December 6, 1999
Gregory Stewart	Marine Branch, Kootenay Lake	Marine Manager	November 16, 1999
Vince Trozzo	Vancouver Island Region	Project Manager, Paving	January 24, 2000
Stewart Turner	Investment Management	Municipal Policy Coordinator	December 27, 1999
Mark Walters	South Coast Region	Provincial Highway Conditions Center Supervisor	January 31, 2000
Tom Wight	Vancouver Island Region	Supervisor, Design and Surveys	January 4, 2000